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In the Tundras:

Or, Frank Reade, Jr.'s Latest Trip
Through Northern Asia.

By "NONAME."



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IN THE TUNDRAS;

— OR —

FRANK READE, JR.'S LATEST TRIP THROUGH NORTHERN ASIA.

A STRANGE STORY OF A STRANGE LAND.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Across Arabia," "The Magic Mine," "Under the Great Lakes," "Across the Milky Way," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE ELECTRIC "SCOURGE."

FAR away up in the northern section of Siberia, beyond the Steppes and contiguous to the Arctic Ocean, lies a strange land known as the Tundras.

It is a region of moss covered plains and larch grown plateaus. Here the moose and the elk, the bear and the northern wolf roam almost undisturbed.

Yet the Tundras are not wholly without human population.

These are hardy Siberian nomads akin to the Esquimaux and mighty hunters, living in summer in tents of skin and in winter in ice huts.

Savage they are, and lawless. By nature predatory, woe to the traveler, who, unprotected, falls into their clutches. He is at once a victim.

At certain times of the year trading expeditions go there from the great cities of Russia. They take guns and ammunition, baubles and beads, woolen blankets and heavy boots, which they exchange against furs and minerals.

If the barbarians of the Tundras find one of these trading parties at a disadvantage, they are not slow to make the best of that fact.

Consequently the traders generally travel well armed and seldom in small parties.

But even many of them fail to return, and are blotted out of existence as effectually as if they had gone suddenly to the bottom of the sea.

Frank Reade, Jr., the famous young American inventor, had long experienced a desire to visit this little known and comparatively unexplored part of the world.

He had just completed his new electric machine, the Scourge, and was desirous of taking a trip aboard it to some new part of the world.

The Scourge was peculiarly adapted for travel across a level country, and such were the Tundras. This favored the project.

So Frank investigated the subject to the best of his ability.

Having a fair knowledge of the Russian tongue, he procured a copy of the *Novoe Vremya*, the principal Russian newspaper. By some strange chance, his gaze fell upon the following paragraph:

"Great distress is felt at court by the Czar and his immediate family, over the report from the Tundras, of the mysterious disappearance of the Prince Petrowski surveying expedition, which has been traveling in Northern Siberia for the past year.

"The latest reports indicate that the prince's party have fallen victims to the murderous Tundra natives. There were one hundred armed men in the party, but sickness probably decimated them and made of them an easy mark for the barbarians.

"In the party was Olenka, the beautiful and accomplished daughter of the prince, and a warm friend of the Czarina and Czarawitch. To

contemplate her falling into the clutches of the savages is indeed horrible.

"Armed parties have by the Czar's orders departed for the Tundras, but it is not believed that much will be accomplished, for of those who vanish in the Tundras none ever return.

"Count Nikolai Vallonski, the affianced of the young princess, is beside himself with grief. He has just returned from St. Petersburg where he has been organizing an expedition of relief. It is hoped that good tidings may yet arrive. A reward of fifty thousand roubles is offered for the rescue of Olenka."

Frank Reade, Jr., perused this thrilling account several times with the deepest of interest.

At the moment he was in his private office at his machine works in Readestown. Acting upon impulse he touched a bell.

In an instant a diminutive little darky stood on the threshold.

"Pomp!" said Frank.

"Yas, sah!"

"Where is Barney?"

"He am jes' outside, sah!"

"Call him in. I want to talk with both of you."

"All right, sah!"

The coon vanished, but in a few moments he reappeared with a companion. This was a broad shouldered, strongly built little Irishman with a shock of red hair and a comical mug.

The Celt ducked his head.

"Sure, sor, is it meself as yez wud loike to see?" he asked.

"Come here, both of you!" said Frank. "Sit down here. I want to talk with you!"

Then Frank told them of the Tundras and read them the article in the Russian newspaper.

It is needless to say that both listened with the deepest of interest. Barney even waxed excited.

"Be me sowl," he cried, "it's a murderin' shame to lave the young laddy in the hands av thim barbarians. Shure, she ought to be rescued!"

"There is no certainty that she is alive," said Frank.

"Bejabbers, thin, an example ought to be made av the omadhonnas thimselves."

Frank could not help a laugh.

"Well, you may be right, Barney," he declared. "In any event, it will be a good trip for us with the Scourge. We shall have an object in view. In what condition is the machine?"

"Shure, sor, it's all roight, with a few more provisions aboard," replied the Celt. "Whin will we be startin', sor?"

"I will decido to-morrow."

"Golly," said Pomp, rolling his eyes, "how eiber am we gwine to find our way up into dat country, sah?"

"We will place the Scourge aboard a steamer for Copenhagen," replied Frank. "Thence we shall proceed up the Baltic to St. Peters-

burg. The trip after that will be overland. As this is the spring of the year, we shall be able to travel through Siberia during the summer."

"Whurro!" cried Barney, turning a hand-spring. "Sure it's eager I am to be off."

"Then away with you both, and see that the Scourge is safely packed aboard a good freight car for New York," said Frank. "Pack her in sections and leave nothing."

Away Barney and Pomp scampered. They were overjoyed with the prospect of a near relief of the monotony of life in Rendestown. The trip to Russia had promise of all the excitement they might desire.

Frank now wrote out a cable dispatch to St. Petersburg as follows:

"To the Minister of State, at Moscow.

"I have read of the disappearance of the Petrowski party in the Tundras. If it is the will of the Czar I will undertake a rescue expedition, with my electric land-machine, the Scourge. If you desire that I shall do this, please to cable me in return and afford me passports or letters of safety to the Siberian frontier.

"Yours, FRANK READE, JR."

This message was sent at night. No answer came the next day, nor the day after. The young inventor had begun to fear that silence was to signify dissent, when a reply came.

Thus it read:

"The Palace, St. Petersburg.

"The Czar sends his best greetings to the American inventor and gladly accepts his kind offer, at the same time doubling the offer of reward. Letters of safety will be available on arrival at St. Petersburg. Honorable greetings, CHAPLINEKI, Minister."

This settled the matter. The trip to the Tundras was an assured enterprise. Very quickly preparations were completed.

The Scourge was packed safely aboard a car and thence was shipped to New York. Here she was placed aboard a steamer for Copenhagen.

The voyage across the Atlantic was not a bad one and from Copenhagen the travelers secured passage aboard another vessel for St. Petersburg.

When the party landed here they were met by the American Minister and the Czar's representative. They were at once invited to the palace.

Here Frank was accorded a personal interview with the Czar. It was a very pleasant meeting, and when Frank came away, he was ready to agree that the Emperor of all the Russias was not such a bad fellow after all.

The Scourge had been carried in sections to a large building in a public square, which was guarded with police.

Here the Scourge was put together, and as she was completed the Russian officers regarded her with admiration and wonderment.

In designing the Scourge, Frank had borne in mind the fact that it was necessary to construct a vehicle capable of traveling in a rough and perhaps hostile country.

The platform of the machine was of steel and rested upon a running gear of steel, with four broad, rubber-tired wheels. The axles were connected by driving rods with the electric engine which furnished the motive power.

Above the platform was erected a structure, partly of steel plates, and partly of steel netting. In the netting were loopholes for use in case of an attack.

This netting was of the finest steel, and capable of resisting a bullet at the closest range.

Around the entire platform was a rail of brass and a narrow deck. A gang-ladder could be lowered from the rear.

Forward was a square structure with plate glass windows and a cab-shaped roof. This was the pilot-house. Here was the steering gear of the machine.

Over the pilot-house was a powerful electric search-light. Forward, and on a raised platform, was a dynamite gun, the invention of Frank Reade, Jr.

It was very light, being a mere cylinder of steel, but it could throw an explosive dynamite shell, by pneumatic pressure, fully a mile.

With this gun a small army could be held at bay. Upon it Frank depended for safe travel through all the countries which he might visit.

The interior of the Scourge was quite finely fitted up. There were sleeping berths and a main apartment, which served as a living room. Weapons of all kinds, ammunition and stores were provided for a long trip.

CHAPTER II.

ACROSS RUSSIA.

LEAVING St. Petersburg just as the Russian summer was getting under way, the party of explorers aboard the Scourge followed the post roads of the empire until they reached the banks of the River Divina.

Crossing this by means of a ferry, they now entered upon a wild tract of country extending to the base of the Ural Mountains.

At times they were obliged to cut across the rough country, sometimes over boulder strewn plains, again through dense forests, where dynamite was sometimes needed to cut a way.

Again they came to banks of strong flowing rivers where there was no bridge or ferry.

Then the Scourge was launched, just as a boat would be, and with adjustable paddles on her wheels she would paddle to the opposite shore.

Thus obstacles were surmounted and barriers passed. Sometimes they passed through sections peopled with Cossacks, lawless fellows, and trouble might have arisen but for the fact that military posts were everywhere. It was an easy matter to run to one of these.

Of course, personally Frank had no fear of these Cossacks, for a few shots from the dynamite gun would dispel a legion of them.

But it was his politic plan to get through the Czar's dominions without any clash with his barbarous subjects if possible.

So he always appealed to some Russian post-commander, showing his letters of safety. Then soldiers would be dispatched to warn the Cossacks.

In this manner the Scourge kept on. Some strange sights were witnessed and some wonderful scenery.

Not a few thrilling adventures were experienced. The chief of these befell Barney and Pomp while making the passage of the Ural Mountains.

Frank had learned from a Russian post-commander that the Varlinski Pass was the least difficult, and at once struck for that.

They crossed several high plateaus and finally entered a deep cut, the walls of which were easily two hundred feet high. All one day they picked their way along in this cut.

At times the path verged upon a mighty precipice and would hardly allow the passage of the machine. Then it would grow narrow and some huge boulder would appear as an obstruction.

A shell from the dynamite gun would generally dispose of this. But yet it made progress slow.

Nightfall overtook them in the pass. At midnight a terrific storm swept through the gorge.

The lightning burned out a few of the electric connections in the engine-room, and Frank found the next morning that it would be a half day's work to replace them.

This gave Barney and Pomp an opportunity they had desired. This was to hunt mountain goats among the defiles of the great range.

Frank gave his permission, and at once, with much joy, they made preparations. It did not take them long to get ready.

With their Winchesters and plenty of cartridges they set out.

They were in the highest of spirits. The air was clear and exhilarating, and the sun had dried the rocks so that they were no longer slippery.

Leaving the defile, they climbed over a high wall of rock and entered a scraggy growth of mountain fir. They could see the green pockets beyond, where the goats would feed.

"Bejehers!" cried Barney, "I hope it's a folne bag we'll be afther getting, naygar!"

"Golly! mebbe de game will git us!" sniffed Pomp.

"Phwat do yez mane?"

"Yo' heerd wha' I said."

"Shure, it's goats we're afther."

"An' it am hears dat lib in dese yere places. How yo' like to cum across two or free ob dem?"

Barney gave a hoarse laugh.

"Shure, I niver see the bate av yoz fer a scare-crow!" he cried. "In my way av thinkin' a bear is afther hein' a better target fer a rifle than a goat."

"Mebbe yo' talk diffrent whea yo' see one," muttered Pomp.

In spite of his bravado Barney was a bit uneasy.

Not that the Celt was a coward. By no means!

He was the very essence of grit when occasion demanded, yet his inborn prejudice for a spook or a bear would assert itself.

So the two hunters went forward not without caution, keeping a lookout to the right and left as well as ahead.

But suddenly Barney caught sight of a moving white object in the distance. It was a mountain goat.

At once his nerves tingled.

Fear had vanished.

He thought only of securing the game. He began to calculate his chances.

The Winchester could easily kill the animal at that range, but the position for the shot was not a good one.

The creature was moving along the crest of a crag, over which no human being could have traveled. With that apparent recklessness peculiar to those wonderful mountain climbers, the goat did not seem to heed the precariousness of his footing.

Barney began to shift around to the other side of the clump of firs. Pomp had gone a little ways farther to the other side looking for another goat.

Barney finally got a good line upon the goat and drew careful aim. Crack!

The creature gave a convulsive leap in the air and came tumbling down from the crag. The Celt in his exuberance gave a yell of joy.

Then Pomp's rifle cracked. But his aim was bad and only one goat was bagged. This must be the extent of the hunt for the time being as the rest of the goats, wary creatures, were ere this far out of range.

So as Barney reached the dead goat, Pomp also appeared on the scene. The darky was disconcerted.

The goat lay at the foot of the crags, and as the two hunters now approached the spot, they were given an astonishing surprise.

At the foot of the ascent and back of where the goat lay was a dark mouthed cavity. Suddenly a black object appeared in this.

It was of gigantic proportion. At sight of it, both Barney and Pomp came to a startled halt.

"Massy Lordy!" gasped the coon. "Wha' I tell yo' chile? It am a b'ari!"

"Hawly mither!" ejaculated the Celt. "Phwat a lucky thing we see that chap in toime. Bad cess to the baste!"

A howl of rage escaped the Celt's lips. The bear, a monster of the Siberian species, had spied the dead goat.

A toothsome feast was before his eyes. There was no apparent reason to Bruin why he should not take it in.

Accordingly he emerged wholly from his den and fell upon the goat with ravenous appetite.

The disappointment of Barney was almost ludicrous. He stood for a moment, half in doubt and half in anger.

"Whurroo!" he yelled. "It's a mighty uncivil baste yez are. I've a moind to thry a shot at yez."

"Golly! don't try it, chile," remonstrated Pomp. "Yo' might not kill him an' den we hab trouble."

Both knew well what a difficult thing it was to kill a bear. It is possible to shoot one of them as full of holes as a sieve and then not kill it. In the meanwhile the bear will not be idle.

But Barney's dander was up, and he raised his rifle and fired at the brute.

The bullet struck the monster somewhere in the neck. That it was a surprise to him was certain.

Up reared his giant shaggy form, and then he caught sight of his human foes. Instantly his mlea changed.

Without a moment's hesitation he came sailing down the slope like a cannon ball. Pomp gave one look and fled. Barney followed him.

But the bear galloped upon them easily, so rough was the ground. He seemed sure to overtake them.

"Wha' de debbil yo' fire fo', yo' big chumpl!" cried Pomp, angrily.

"Don't yo' know no bettah? Dat b'ar git us fo' sho'!"

"Be me sowl, I'm afther thinkin' that same!" agreed Barney.

"Shure we'd better give him another bullet!"

"Yo' oughter keep away from me den," breathed Pomp. "Go ober dat side an' if he take fo' yo', I stop an' fire. But if he take fo' me, yo' stop."

"All roight."

So they separated. But the bear kept on after Pomp. At once Barney halted and sent a bullet after him.

It did not check him, however. Once more the Celt fired.

This time the brute staggered. But he was very close to Pomp. Suddenly the coon stumbled and fell.

And as he did so he vanished completely from sight. The bear made a lunge over the spot where he had been and then losing his headway, went sprawling over the edge of a precipice to the left.

Barney, forgetting Pomp for the moment, rushed to the edge of the precipice and peered over to see what had become of the bear.

He beheld an astonishing sight.

Bruin had slid down the smooth face of the cliff and striking a sharp jagot, which projected from a cleft, had become actually impaled upon it. There he hung roaring lustily.

The Celt was so overcome with triumph and delight that he flung himself down upon the verge of the cliff, and leaning over, began to taunt the bear.

"Bad cess to yez, it's a folne scrape yez are in now," cried the Celt. "Prisintly I'll come down an' cut the ears off yez. Whisht!"

Something made a scraping noise behind the Celt. Before he could turn his head a whiff of musky breath struck his face, and a great fur-clad object hovered over him.

The next moment he was shoved over the edge of the cliff.

Barney had not time to even clutch the edge of the precipice. Over he went and straight down toward the impaled bear.

The fall was full forty feet, and might ordinarily have resulted seriously for Barney. But he did not fall the entire distance.

Instead, he fell directly upon the impaled bear, and clutching at the stake sat fairly astride the brute's neck. As for the bear it was powerless to do him harm, and there in this strange position both hung precariously.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE TUNDRAS.

It was one of the greatest surprises of Barney's career.

For a moment he could hardly imagine what had happened to him. Then he looked up and saw a long black snout thrust over the verge of the cliff, and a pair of sharp black eyes looking mildly down upon him.

It was another bear, perhaps the mate of the impaled beast.

He had doubtless come along behind the Celt and with his powerful snout, had, actuated by some curious impulse, pushed him over the cliff.

The Celt recognized this fact at once and it is needless to say that he was more than delighted at his escape from being chewed up.

"Howly smoke," he muttered. "Here's a folne scrape. Shure I don't know phwat to do wld mesilf. Av I shay here, this brute may

git howld av me legs! Av I fall, I may break me back and if I go back, shure that big divil up there will make a folne meal af me."

So Barney decided for the time being to stay where he was.

The impaled bear was groaning and struggling to get free. But he only succeeded in getting further onto the stake.

At this juncture, for the first time, Barney thought of Pomp.

"Shure, phwativer became av the naygur?" he muttered. "That's very quare, indade!"

He recollected now seeing the coon fall into some sort of a hole, while being pursued by the bear. But he had not seen him thereafter. Here was a puzzle.

Perhaps Pomp had met with a serious injury. He might even be dead.

As this occurred to him, Barney began to wax anxious. At once he decided to change his position.

He had no doubt of his ability to reach the bottom of the defile safely. A leathern lariat hung at his waist.

"Och, hone!" he muttered. "I'm thinkin' I'd better go lookin' after the naygur! Shure, somethin's happead him, or I'd hear from him afore now."

Barney placed a revolver to the bear's ear and fired. It had the effect of at once ending the brute's sufferings.

Then he made a loop with the lariat about the base of the stake and began to slide down to the ground.

Arrived there, he recovered his lariat and proceeded along the base of the cliff looking for a method of ascent.

As he did so he heard a rustling sound in a little clump of mountain hash which grew against the base of the cliff. Then the branches parted and a black object appeared.

"Howly smoke!" gasped the Celt. "Is it yez, naygur?"

It was Pomp!

The coon rose to his feet in a dazed way and looked about him. Then Barney saw that right in his rear there was a cavernous orifice in the cliff.

"Golly!" ejaculated the darky; "am dat yo', fish?"

"Shure, it's mesilf!"

"I'm dreful glad ob dat."

"Will yez explain where yez have been all this toime?"

"Suah, chile," replied Pomp. "Yo' see, I doae stepped into some sort ob a hole in de ground an' fell, de good Lor' only knows where. When I fotched up it was all dark around me, an' I knowed I was somewhar uadahground."

"Wall, den I begin to crawl around to fia' my way out, an' I doae fo't I neber should, when I jes' see a lily bit ob daylight ahead, an' yere I is!"

"Mither uv Moses!" ejaculated Barney. "It's some koid av a cave, thin?"

"So I reckon!"

"Av coonsel Well, it's glad I am yez are not hurt worse!"

Then Barney related his own experiences to which Pomp listened with interest.

The coon was indeed astonished as he looked up and saw the dead bear on the stake. The other bear had disappeared.

The two explorers congratulated themselves upon their very narrow escape.

As neither had any desire of courting further acquaintance with the bears, and as the goats were doubtless beyond further pursuit that day, Barney suggested that the trip be abandoned for the time, and that they return to the Scourge.

This was the best move they could make, as it was already near noon. So they set out down the defile.

In due time they reached the main pass and saw the Scourge below. A few moments later they were aboard.

The next day the steppes and plains on the eastern side of the Ural Mountains burst into view.

Siberia was spread before them in all its mighty desolation.

Yet the steppes looked green and inviting, the air was full of water fowl, and song birds were in the bush. It was hard to realize that fully nine months of the year snow lay on these eternal plains.

Each day's journey now brought them nearer to the Tundras.

Some days the machine made great speed over the level plains. At other times, swamps and rivers made progress slow.

Frank bore more to the northward now. It was in that direction that the Tundras lay.

As they neared these mighty waters, the grass became more stunted and gave way to beds of soft moss.

There were stunted clumps of birch and larches, and sometimes droves of elks were frightened from these.

It seemed as if one was very near the sky here. The days were very long, the sun traveling partly around the horizon, owing of course, to the proximity to the pole.

Thus far but little had been seen of human habitation.

But one day a faint column of smoke was seen far away on the level waste. Pretty soon another was seen and another.

Then it seemed as if the whole plain was dotted with smoke columns. Then small objects were seen moving about.

They looked too small for elk and too large for wolves.

Frank started them through the glass for a while and said:

"Those are men or women or both."

"Golly!" muttered Pomp. "Dere am a heap ob dem."

"Yes. We have no doubt struck a camp of the Tundras nomads."

"Shure, how kin that be, sor?" asked Barney. "I see no tents, sor, an' wud they camp among thim geysers, sir?"

"Geysers?" exclaimed Frank. "That is not steam, but smoke!"
 "Share, then, the ground must be all afoiré around here, then?"
 "We shall see!" said Frank, who was not a little puzzled himself. Then, as the Scourge drew nearer, an explanation was had. Suddenly men and horses seemed as it were to spring from the ground.

Hundreds of them appeared in a twinkling. They seemed to collect in a panic-stricken way and the distant sound of a drum was heard.

But that they were not panic-stricken was quickly in evidence. For all mounted and came in full speed toward the Scourge.

Frank now understood perfectly well what the columns of smoke meant.

Owing to lack of high timber with which to make dwellings, these nomads lived in dugouts. Here they burned the peat or moss which abounded everywhere, and made the hottest of fires.

In summer the fires kept out the dampness—in winter the cold, and here they almost hibernated.

These underground dwellings were, in some cases, quite extensive, for horses and dogs also found a home in them. No matter how fierce the north wind blew across the Tundras, the nomads could not feel it in their mole-like dwellings.

Only in the spring were they made at all uncomfortable, when sometimes freshets filled the dugouts and forced them to live shivering above the ground a few days.

The water, however, quickly passed away into the porous soil. Then they could return.

At sight of the Scourge the nomads came out in force.

To them it was some strange caravan from that far Western empire, from whence came traders, and upon whom they depended for many of their luxuries.

But as they drew nearer the wheeled vehicle, they began to spread out and make a circle.

In a trice the Scourge was completely surrounded.

Frank could not help a smile.

He understood what this meant.

"Probably, if they find us unprotected and not capable of self-defense they will attack us!" he said. "That is a cheerful habit they have!"

Barney spat on his hands.

"Jist let thim thry it!" he cried.

"Golly! We done make a hole in dem wif de 'lectric gun!" declared Pomp.

Frank slackened speed, and now the nomads mounted on their Tartar ponies, galloped nearer.

A hard looking lot they were.

Dark visaged, with black beards and matted hair, they were dressed in skins and furs, and rode without saddle and but a light bridle.

They were armed with guns, mostly of the Turkish and Russian type and also with knives. Some of them carried lances and even bows and arrows.

As they circled about the machine they uttered curious grunting cries. Their expression was one of general curiosity.

Frank did not bring the Scourge to a stop until at the very verge of the dugout town.

Then he walked out on the forward platform and made signs to the nomads. They grouped in a circle about the machine a hundred yards or so distant.

After some consultation three of them rode slowly forward.

Now, Frank had a fair knowledge of the Russian tongue, so he had little difficulty in addressing them, for they also understood Russian.

Frank asked them first:

"Are you dwellers in the Tundras?"

"We are, noble visitor," was the reply. "Whence do you travel?"

"I come from a far land," replied Frank. "My people are the most powerful in the world."

"Seek you trade with us?"

"No!"

This seemed to surprise the nomads, and they conferred for some while with themselves. Finally one of them asked again:

"What seek you in the Tundras?"

"I am an emissary of the White Czar!" replied Frank. "I have his letters of safety to travel in these parts."

CHAPTER IV.

THE PEOPLE OF THE TUNDRAS.

"THE White Czar never comes to the Tundras himself," replied the spokesman in an insolent way. "He has threatened us, but he does not come. We are people of peace. This is our land. What comes here we claim."

"Oh, that is the way of it," replied Frank, coolly. "Perhaps, then, you can tell me of Prince Petrowski and his daughter Olenka?"

This seemed to startle the trio. Again they consulted and then one of them rode nearer.

"Come you for the Prince Petrowski?" he asked, curiously.

"I come to learn his fate," replied Frank.

"He is dead."

"What of his daughter?"

"She is dead also."

But Frank fancied a peculiar intonation in this last declaration. He leaned over the rail.

"Then you have murdered them," he said suddenly.

The nomad spokesman's face underwent a hideous contortion. His blood-shot gaze focused Frank.

"What of that?" he hissed.

"If it is true, I shall destroy every dwelling in your town," replied Frank, in a voice of steel. "If either of them are alive, I demand that you give them up to us. If you do not, you shall have terrible punishment."

The nomad listened stolidly. Then he answered contemptuously:

"We have greater numbers than you. We can take you for being on our land. Your drosky shall be ours, and you we will draw upon a stake. Come down and surrender."

Frank saw that trouble was coming.

But he had arrived at two firm conclusions. One was that the princess had not been murdered and was somewhere yet held a captive.

Whether she had met with a fate worse than death and was in slavery he could not guess. But if she was alive, then he must make an effort to rescue her.

He realized that the nomads, as yet, did not understand his power. He had threatened to destroy their dugout houses.

He could easily blow them up with his dynamite shells.

But he realized also that this would mean the slaughter of many women and children. He did not care to do this, yet he knew that the wretches must be taught a lesson and brought to terms.

How to do this he hardly knew. He felt sure that they would attack the Scourge.

Of course, it would then be necessary to fire upon them. It would mean more or less human slaughter.

But he was resolved to make one last attempt at a compromise. So he leaned over the rail and said, vigorously:

"Look here, you scoundrel!—listen to what I say! I mean every word of it! Ten times your number cannot take this drosky!"

"We shall see!" said the fellow, coolly and confidently. "Don't forget that you are surrounded."

"It matters not if I am," replied Frank. "I warn you not to attempt it. I have a powerful gun which can blow you to perdition. It would sweep you all out of existence. Now, take the warning!"

The nomad by way of reply turned and emitted a peculiar cry. It was answered by the entire body of horsemen.

Frank swept his gaze over them. He saw that they were nearly a thousand in number.

Really, they were a formidable array. But against the electric gun Frank felt that they could not stand.

So he went back into the pilot-house. It was the lull just before a storm. All was quiet.

Frank placed a hand on the motor lever. The machine began to move forward. But it did not get under way, when the air was broken with the battle cry of the nomads.

Down they swept toward the machine. Frank knew that the impetus of such a force striking the Scourge might be disastrous.

He did not intend that this should happen. He instantly put on speed and the machine shot toward the nomad village.

There was a break in the circle just there. But Frank trained the electric gun instantly.

Barney took the lever, while Frank was at the gun. The young inventor placed a shell in the breech and waited.

The nomads came charging down madly. They had apparently no fears whatever as to the result.

It looked like an easy matter to overwhelm the three defenders of the "drosky," as they called the Scourge.

But that they had made the gravest mistake of their lives was soon put in evidence.

Frank calculated the distance nicely, and then pressed the electric button. The air-chamber expanded with a hiss, there was a slight recoil and the shell was on its way.

It struck just in the midst of the advancing line of foes. The result was thrilling.

A terrific thunderous roar filled the air. A great heap of earth, moss and shattered bodies of men and horses was flung up into the air.

A tremendous furrow was torn up, and into this trench fully a dozen of the foe tumbled in death. The line was instantly shattered.

Startled by the unearthly roar and burst of flame, the nomads' horses became uncontrollable. In a moment the foe were scattered.

Barney brought the machine about instantly and shot off at a right angle. Before one could hardly embrace the scene, the Scourge was outside the circle of foes which had surrounded it.

And now once again Frank brought the gun to bear upon the nomads. He meant to give them bitter punishment.

So he sent another shell into their midst.

This threw them into further confusion. It was a complete repulse. They retreated in terror and astonishment.

To them it was an amazing denouement.

They had felt morally and physically certain of capturing the "drosky." The result was an eye-opener.

Fully a score of their number lay dead on the plain. It was to them almost beyond comprehension.

None of them were familiar with dynamite. To them it was the act of a wizard.

And as a result superstitious fear seized them. Many of them sped away over the tundras as if for their lives.

The women and children of the dugout town vanished underground. Some of the men did likewise.

Frank sat on shells inside the dugouts. He had no desire to make farther bloodshed than was necessary.

He was well satisfied with the result of the affair. He had simply intended to give the nomads a lesson and he had succeeded.

The Scourge slowly began a circuit of the dugout town. Frank kept his glass upon the place all the while.

He was mentally calculating the chances of Olenka's being in some one of these underground dwellings, and if she was how was he to find her.

He could think of but one way to learn this.

He kept an eye out for a stray nomad. Suddenly he saw one making away over the plain on his pony.

"I want that fellow," he said to Barney. "Bring him down!"

"All right, sir!"

Away shot the Scourge in hot pursuit. Of course, the pony was no match for the machine.

The nomad saw his pursuer and probably thought his day had come. He began dodging, but still could not elude the Scourge.

Pomp now came to the fore with his Winchester. He took careful aim and fired.

The pony dropped. The rider lay on the plain half senseless. In a moment the Scourge reached the spot.

Barney and Pomp sprang down and captured the nomad. He was quickly brought aboard.

He was not long in coming to. His terror was great and he begged for his life abjectly.

Frank silenced him, and then said, sternly:

"Now, my man, look here. If you want to live answer truthfully everything I ask you."

The fellow promised earnestly.

"Very good! Now, tell me, is the princess near here?"

"I cannot tell you that, noble master. I do not know."

"Is she alive?"

"Yes."

Frank experienced a thrill.

"Good!" he declared. "Who holds her in captivity?"

"Ah, sir, our starosta, the noble Count Bagun Ravetski."

"Ravetski!" ejaculated Frank. "That is a Russian name!"

"It is."

"Why—how does it happen?"

"Bagun Ravetski is a Russian."

"Indeed!"

"But he was an exile, great master. Escaping from the convict gang of Irkutsk he came hither and joined us. We have made him starosta."

"So he holds the princess captive?"

"He does, noble sir. It is Count Bagun's wish to marry the princess."

"Marry her? Ah, I see the whole game! Is she likely to consent?"

"Never! She hates him!"

"Have you heard any report of her lover—Nikolai Vallonski?"

"Ah, noble sir, he is dead. Bagun overtook him and his company of armed men and slaughtered them all, not a week since."

Frank kept his brows.

"That is all," he said; "I have gained all I wish to know. Take your life and freedom."

The nomad was abject in his expressions of gratitude. Then he quickly slid over the rail.

Frank had learned all that he wished to know.

He believed all that the fellow had told him, save that Count Ravetski had slain Nikolai and his men.

"That is all a yarn," he muttered. "Nikolai had a splendid escort with him, and could give battle to a small army. Well, now I must try and learn where the princess is confined. Then I shall rescue her."

With this he went below.

CHAPTER V.

IN DEMON LAND.

DARKNESS was fast coming on. Frank regretted this, extremely.

He had been most anxious to at once push his search for the princess. With what he had already learned he felt sure of success.

He was most desirous of seeing Ravetski. He wished at least to see what he looked like.

This Siberian exile, who had taken up a home with the nomads, was no doubt a rascal. It was he who had influenced the nomads to attack Prince Petrovski's party without question.

Whether Ravetski had been in the attacking party or not, Frank had no means of knowing. He was desirous of making sure of this.

For he felt sure that if the Princess Olenka was held a prisoner anywhere in the vicinity, Ravetski was near her. Frank studied the matter long and deep.

He was not sure of his game yet. Just how to gain it was as yet a problem. But Frank Rende, Jr., was not to be defeated.

Fires glowed everywhere on the tundras. The nomads did not venture another attack upon the Scourge. The repulse had been a severe lesson to them.

The night passed without incident.

Barney and Pomp took their turns in keeping guard until daylight came. Then Frank came on deck.

The young inventor had decided upon a plan of action.

In the center of the dugout village a great number of the nomads with their horses were gathered. Frank had decided to invade the town.

This involved some risk, for it was hard to tell just where to travel between the underground dwellings without crashing through the roofs of moss and turf. Such an accident would have endangered the safety of the Scourge and its passengers.

So as the machine moved forward the ground was closely scanned. Slowly the Scourge passed among the rising columns of smoke which marked the location of the dwellings.

In this manner the invaders proceeded for some ways. The nomads themselves seemed panic-stricken.

Men, women and children began to rush pell mell out of the dwellings. But Frank now raised a white flag as a signal of truce.

This was seen and understood, and one of the natives advanced to hold a parley, he also carrying a flag. Frank brought the Scourge to a halt.

When within speaking distance the Siberian truce-bearer halted. Frank stepped out on the platform.

The parley was short and sharp.

"What do you want with us, noble stranger?" asked the truce-bearer in an imperative voice.

"I want to see and talk with Prince Bagun Ravetski," replied Frank.

"He is not here."

"Where is he then?"

"We know not. He left here long since for the south. He will not return."

"I will give you thirty minutes to produce Prince Bagun and the princess," said Frank, sternly. "If they are not produced in that time I will blow your village from the face of the earth."

The truce bearer made no reply but at once moved away. He conveyed this declaration to his companions.

A discussion was held, which, from the deck of the Scourge could be seen to be quite animated.

After a while five of the nomads began to approach the Scourge. It was evident that they wished to hold another parley.

Frank was very willing, and at once went out again to meet them. The spokesman said:

"Most noble lord, we beg you not to use your big gun against us. We have done no wrong and mean you no harm. The princess is not here or we would give her up to you. Prince Bagun is not here, but has gone to the south with the princess and a body of fighting men. We will go with you to find him, but do not destroy us."

Frank saw that the tundras nomads were sincere. At once his manner changed toward them.

"Enough," he declared; "I will not do you harm if you will stand by that agreement. You shall go with me to find Bagun and the princess."

"We will!" replied the spokesman, eagerly. "How many of us do you require?"

"As many as care to go!"

"We will go, one hundred of us!"

"Very well! Can you start at once?"

"Within the hour!"

"That is good!"

Frank felt that he had gained a great point. He had at least made a beginning.

He was assured now, beyond all doubt, that neither Bagun nor the princess were in the dugout village. He felt certain of overtaking them.

It did not take the nomads long to get ready. They had but to bridle their ponies, and equip themselves with weapons and some dried meat for food. Then they were ready.

They galloped out on the plain ahead of the Scourge, which moved along slowly behind them.

All that day they traveled southward over the tundras.

As they kept on the region underwent a slight change. Many dry river courses were crossed, and suddenly there appeared a strange, jagged outline on the horizon.

"What is that?" asked Pomp, staring at the distant break in the level plain. "But what is it, a mountain, I mean it, Master Frank?"

"No," replied Frank, himself puzzled. "It looks very much like the entrance to that wonder of wonders—the Bad Lands of Dakota."

Indeed, this was true. Great twisted shapes rose from the plain, with channels running here and there.

Frank signaled one of the nomads, who came up.

"What is yonder broken country?" he asked.

"That, sir," replied the nomad, "is the Demon Land, though it is said that demons have long since left it."

As the Scourge drew nearer it could be seen that they were now entering upon a veritable counterpart of the Bad Lands of the United States.

Great channels had been worn in the formation of marl and sandstone, which had once been the surface of a high plateau.

The storms of centuries had snuffed to cut this up into all sorts of odd and fantastic shapes. There were dellies and pockets without number. Into these the party went.

The region covered fully one hundred square miles. It served as a hiding-place for bands of robbers and thieves, and it was here that Bagun had brought the Princess Olenka.

There were caves without number and hiding-places uncounted. In any of these she might be confined.

Many of these strange formations took the shape of quite formidable structures of defense. Behind some of the embankments and natural citadels, a band of men could have made strong defense.

Frank felt sure that the nomads had proven their good faith, and brought him to the real hiding-place of Bagun.

So he was all the more confident of success, though bound to admit that it was going to be no easy task to find the villain in all this wilderness of holes and caverns and dens.

Here a halt was called and a consultation held.

The nomads were anxious to return to their dugout homes, and were loath to enter the Demon Land further.

Frank could see no reason for keeping them longer, so he agreed to their wishes. A short while later they galloped away homeward.

It was now a problem with the rescuers as to how to find the exact hiding-place of Bagun and his men.

It was not quite as bad as looking for a needle in a haystack, though indeed a difficult task.

The Scourge continued to make its way among the labyrinthine ways of the Demon Land. For some hours the party went on in this way.

But no sign of human life, not a footprint was seen. Frank had begun to consider the outlook a dubious one.

Suddenly the distant neigh of a horse was heard. Then the crack of a rifle followed.

"Begorra!" cried Barney. "Shure some wan is comin' this way."

"Good," said Frank, grimly. "I trust it may be the parties we are looking for."

The sound of horses' hoofs were now plainly heard, also the murmur of voices and the clank of arms. A body of men were near by.

Frank pushed the Scourge forward. Though he suddenly caught a glimpse through a distant cut in the sandstone of red uniforms.

A file of men were galloping at right angles to the course of the Scourge.

"Fire a gun, Barney!" cried Frank. "Anything to attract their attention."

"All roight, sor!"

The Colt caught up his rifle and fired. Instantly the file of riders swerved their horses.

They came to a halt. Then Barney fired again and shouted.

The next moment the cavalcade swerved into the dellie and came in sight of the Scourge. A great shout went up.

Down came the cavalcade with drawn swords. In a few moments they swarmed about the Scourge.

Frank had recognized them at once. He knew the Russian uniforms of the Czar's soldiers.

He felt sure that this was the party commanded by Nikolai Vallonski, the lover of the Princess Olenka. It was a happy meeting.

Of course Vallonski and his men knew nothing of the Scourge or its mission.

They were astonished at its appearance and also at sight of the American flag floating from its rear end.

Frank stepped out on the platform.

"Hail!" he cried in Russian.

"All hail!" was the reply by a half hundred voices.

"I come from the Czar," declared Frank. "Here are his letters of safety."

At once every Russian cavalryman rose in his saddle and cheered in a thunderous fashion. It was a joyful bit of news to them.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BLACK RIDER.

THEN the leader of the cavalcade, a tall, darkly handsome fellow, rode up close to the Scourge and saluted with the flat of his sword.

He spoke in Russian:

"Whom have we the honor of meeting? You give the credentials of the Czar?"

"Yes," replied Frank. "And if you are Count Nikolai Vallonski I have brought you good news!"

The young officer gave a cry of delight.

"I am that personage," he replied.

"Good! Then I will tell you that I am just come from St. Petersburg. That your friends there all have given you up for lost."

"Mother of Mary!" exclaimed the young count. "I am as well as you at this moment, and only distraught over the unknown fate of Olenka."

"Exactly, but your friends have had no news of you!"

"Nor have I had a way to send them news!"

"Very true! It is enough that I have found you!"

"You come from the Czar?"

"Yes."

"Then you are in his service?"

"Not exactly. I am a volunteer in the effort to rescue you."

"Pardon! This is strange. You are an American?"

"I am."

"Ah, that is a grand country. I visited that land years ago with the Grand Duke. But you have courage to come into this land of robbers with only that frail drosky for means of travel."

"You do not understand," said Frank, with a smile. "There is power enough in this drosky to annihilate a small army."

"Indeed, I do not understand," said the count in amazement.

"Wherein is the power, good friend?"

"Come aboard and I will show you."

Count Nikolai descended from his horse readily and went aboard the Scourge. He was shown over the machine by Frank.

It is needless to say that he was delighted as well as astonished.

"Ah!" he said. "You Americans are wonderful masters of invention. So you have come all the way from your native land to assist me in the rescue of Olenka. You shall be rewarded."

"I ask no reward," replied Frank.

"But you shall have it!"

"The only reward I can ask for is success. My mission is not wholly to rescue the princess, but also to visit and explore the Tundra."

"I am at your service."

"Thank you."

"Have you any suggestion to make as to the most feasible manner in which to rescue the princess?"

"Hardly as yet. I think we had better first look the ground over, and decide on a plan of action later."

"Good! We shall be great friends."

"I hope so."

The count now returned to his men, whom he acquainted with the state of affairs. They cheered the Scourge and party most happily.

Then a startling incident occurred.

Suddenly the clatter of hoofs was heard down the dellie. All turned and were astonished to see a black horse and masked rider approaching them.

He carried a white flag and rode recklessly as if sure of a safe reception. Some of the guards drew weapons, but the count cried:

"Hold! he is a truce bearer!"

The unknown horseman reined his steed up a few yards' distant. He was a powerful man, and wore a uniform as black as the shining coat of his horse.

His eyes gleamed through the eye-holes in the mask like black diamonds. He surveyed the party a moment, and then said, in a steely voice:

"I am the Prince of Demon Land. Who are you, and what means this invasion upon my territory?"

For a moment, so great was the general astonishment, that no one could speak. Finally Count Nikolai reined his horse forward and said, searchingly:

"What high sounding title is this? I have not seen your name in the book of peers."

"I know nor care nothing for that," replied the black horseman, haughtily.

"Indeed!" replied Nikolai, in a suave manner. "As a subject of the Czar, and—"

"I owe no allegiance to the Czar nor any other despot on earth!"

Sharp cries went up from the cavalymen, but Nikolai repressed them. He continued in his penetrating manner.

"Any petty ruler within the boundaries of the Czar's territory owes tribute to him."

"Let him come and claim his tribute, then," was the haughty reply. "Not all his armies can rout me from my stronghold. I can bid defiance to the world, here in my own retreat."

"Really!" exclaimed Nikolai satirically. "You are a man of no ordinary power!"

"You shall see, if you do not at once leave Demon Land."

"And you shall see, sirrah, that we will rout you out of your Demon Land, and make you bend your knee to the Czar."

"You cannot do it!"

"Who are you?"

"I have told you once!"

"I have reason to believe that you are an exile and a political foe of our government."

"Then let it go at that. Lucky is the man who can throw off and bid defiance to the yoke of despotism."

Suddenly Nikolai changed his manner.

"Come, now," he said. "Perhaps when you know the object of our mission here, you will not deny us a foothold in your kingdom and even give us aid!"

"I will agree to that, only when you have departed. But what has brought you here?"

Frank saw that the black horseman's manner was strangely tense. He recalled this fact later.

"We will depart peacefully upon a certain condition."

"Name it!"

"First I must tell you that a certain scoundrel, named Bagun Ravetski, has foully abducted the Princess Olenka, daughter of the noble Petrowski and he is in hiding in this place at this very moment. We want the princess safe and sound, and if possible, the head of Ravetski. We will then depart. We will even pay a reward."

For full half a minute the black horseman sat silent, his gaze fixed full upon the count.

When he replied it was with a strange, rasping laugh.

"You are the lover of the Princess Olenka. Thou beware! You will never see her again, for—"

"Hond! Then you shall die!" thundered Nikolai, whipping out his sword. In a moment pandemonium reigned, his soldiers trying to push forward.

But the black horseman did not move. His burning gaze was riveted upon the count.

"You will not dare strike a truce-bearer!" he said. "I am under its protection."

"Which is a very fortunate thing for you!" declared the count, as he became calm again. "Whoever you are, take this warning! I will draw you on a stake if harm comes to Olenka. Now, go your way!"

"The stake is already cut for you," hissed the black horseman. "Forget it not."

With this he swept from view like a meteor into a side defile. For some time silence reigned. Then the soldiers began to shift their sabers and mutter ominously. Nikolai turned to Frank Reude, Jr., who was on the front platform of the Scourge.

"You heard that fellow's threat?" he asked.

Frank nodded.

"I did," he replied.

"What do you think of it?"

"I think it a pity that the flag of true protected him, for beyond doubt he was your man Ravetski."

Nikolai forcibly struck his thigh.

"I believe it," he cried. "The dog! My honor alone forbade my unmasking him. But what of his threats?"

"They are empty. He sought to frighten us away. He has failed, and now he will go into hiding."

"It is a pity that he was spared the death punishment and sent to exile," said the count. "His offense was conspiracy against the life of the Czar. We must make sure of him."

"That will be shrewd work."

"What do you advise?"

"Careful and strategic movement. Even if we were to corner him and drive him to the wall, it might be at the cost of Olenka's life."

"You are right!" groaned the count. "Well, I place myself under your orders. You Americans are born generals."

Frank was not long in formulating a plan.

He planned a code of signals, and proposed dividing the entire company of soldiers up into parties of three, which were to be stationed at various points through the region.

"In this manner," declared the young inventor, "we can at least be apprised of any attempt of Ravetski to leave the Demon Land."

"You are right," agreed the count. "Your plan is a good one. In the meanwhile, your drosky—"

"The Scourge will patrol all these passes and defiles continually," said Frank. "I shall leave one man aboard to do this."

"What! and yourself—"

"I shall do a little scouting with one of my men. Something after the Indian fashion. In other words, I shall try and find a trail or work some stratagem upon the rascals."

"Have you any idea how many men Ravetski has?"

"If the nomads were to be believed, fully two hundred."

"Quite a respectable force!"

"Very true. But they are not equipped as our men are. We could stand them all off with half that number to say nothing of the electric gun."

"Good!" cried the count, delightedly. "But—on your scouting tour—may I not accompany you?"

Frank hesitated a moment.

Then he said:

"If you will agree to obey orders!"

"I certainly will!"

"Very good! Let us then get to work at once!"

Frank called Barney and Pomp and stated his plan to them.

"Pomp is to remain constantly in the pilot-house," he said. "Keep constantly on the move through all the passes and defiles. Wait for a signal from me, and when you hear it come at once, for we shall need you."

CHAPTER VII.

THE COUNT DISAPPEARS.

"A'right sah!" agreed the darky. "I do jes' as yo' say, sah!"

"Very good," said Frank. "Now, Barney, get your rifle and come along with us."

Frank, the count and Barney left the Scourge and struck out through the defile taken by Ravetski a few hours before. All plans were now perfected.

The soldiers were all at their posts and the Scourge was on patrol. No move to leave the Demon Land could now be made without a general alarm.

Frank felt sure that he had Ravetski and his gang well penned in. It only remained to cautiously locate them and then spring some sort of a device for their capture.

Frank and Barney kept their eyes out constantly for a trail. The count was on his guard all the while for a surprise from the foe.

They went on through one gorge and another. Frank examined

every point carefully. The walls of defiles, the ground and all clefts and cavities.

He knew that the place was honeycombed with caverns. In some of these Ravetski had his stronghold.

Darkness was settling down, and Frank welcomed it. He decided to wait for it, and drew his companions into a small cleft.

Here they crouched listening and watching. Suddenly Barney gave a start as a strange sound came to his ear.

He placed his ear to the sandstone wall of the cliff and listened.

Then he whispered:

"Be me sowl, Mистер Frank, phwat do yez make av that?"

Frank applied his ear to the cliff as did the count. They listened intently and with surprise.

Human voices were plainly heard. Every word came faintly but distinctly to the ears of the listeners.

The voices were those of a man and a woman. The count's face became white, and he trembled like an aspen as he recognized one voice.

"That is Olenka!" he whispered. "And she is talking with that villain Ravetski."

This seemed true enough. Every word was plainly heard. The villain's voice was raised in anger.

"Then you will not give favor to my suit?" he asked, passionately.

"No!" the girl was heard to say. "I can never marry you. I would rather die. You may torture me if you will!"

"Curse your obstinacy!" Ravetski was heard to say. "I will tame you yet. First, I will give you a bit of news. Your lover, the Count Vallonski, is in Demon Land at this moment."

A glad cry came from Olenka.

"Oh, then, may Heaven be praised! My prayer is answered! He has come to rescue me!"

"He has come to meet his doom!" gritted Ravetski. "I shall have him drawn upon a stake, and it shall be done before your eyes."

The princess screamed with alarm.

"No, no!" she cried. "You will never do that! It would be most dreadful! God would curse you!"

A hoarse laugh was Ravetski's reply. At this moment the count made a great error.

He lost control of himself, and roared:

"Ah, you dog-brother, I'll show you how to be drawn upon the stake yourself. Courage, Olenka, I am here!"

Frank placed a hand over the maddened lover's lips.

"For the love of Heaven, why did you do that?" he whispered.

"You have spoiled everything now, and our chances were so good!"

Chagrined the count drew back. He saw his mistake.

Neither Olenka's nor Ravetski's voice was heard again. No doubt she had been at once dragged away to some other part of the cavern.

But one fact had been learned. She was really in Demon Land, and the cavern was here. Only this wall of sandstone had separated her from her would-be rescuers.

Frank drew back and looked at the cliff.

It was a smooth surface for a height of one hundred feet. No cavity or break was visible anywhere, except the one they were in. This led no further, nor was there any visible entrance to the chamber which must be beyond the cliff wall.

Yet Frank knew that it was possible that no such chamber existed. He knew what tricks walls sometimes have for carrying the sound of voices. The speakers might be several hundred yards away in some other part of the defile.

Yet it was more logical to assume that they were in a chamber on the other side of this wall. That this chamber was only one of many.

How to get into it was a question. There was no means of knowing how thick the wall was.

"If the Scourge was only here now," said Frank, "I'd put a dynamite shell through that wall."

"And by the time we got in there," said the count, "Ravetski and his captive would be gone."

"There is no doubt of that. At the same time we might get a clew as to the means of following them."

"True," agreed Vallonski.

But the Scourge was not on hand.

Frank could have given a signal and had it there quickly, but on second thought he decided not to do so.

"We had better move from this locality," he said. "Ravetski may send some of his men out here. Let us find some hiding place!"

On the opposite side of the gorge was a narrow shelf of rock, above which was another shelf and a little cavity in the sandstone cliff.

Frank made for this and climbed up. In a jiffy he was on the upper shelf.

Barney followed him and the count came next. In the cavity they could crouch safely out of sight.

As Frank had predicted, some of Ravetski's men did appear on the scene. They appeared at each end of the gorge.

In the shadows they came on like prowling wolves, drawing near to the surrounded victim. But they were evidently surprised at not finding that victim.

They soon filled the defile and examined the crevice. None of them in the gloom noticed the crevice in which our friends hovered.

So they crouched there safely and watched the searchers. In the meanwhile the darkness intensified greatly.

Soon it was almost impossible to see across the gorge. The nomads had begun to steal away.

It would have been an easy matter for Frank to have given a signal which would have called many of the soldiers to the spot and also the Scourge.

But he knew that this would avail little.

It might result in a battle and some of the nomads might be slaughtered or captured.

But this was not what Frank wanted. He was playing for bigger game.

Now he leaned over the shelf of rock and listened. Then he swung himself down, whispering:

"Now is our time! Come!"

Barney and the count followed him. They stood in the defile.

The darkness was now so intense that they could hardly distinguish each other.

Frank's acute hearing now stood him in good stead. He led the way stealthily up the gorge.

They slipped along like shadows. Suddenly Frank crouched against the wall of sandstone.

Just ahead were other figures. They were going along silently. Frank at once followed them.

For a long ways up the gorge crept pursued and pursuers. The nomads were all unwitting this fact.

Suddenly they seemed to vanish one by one. Frank noted that they passed to the right in doing so. It was not his plan to hesitate.

He also moved to the right. He felt the cold surface of the wall and then was wedged between opposing walls.

It was a squeeze but only for a moment. He had passed through and Barney and the Count were with him.

It seemed as if they were in a narrow passage, with the night sky far overhead. It was the entrance to a pocket in the curious fissured plateau.

Whether it was also the entrance to the cavern retreat they did not know. Time would tell.

The nomads had vanished. Frank now proceeded with caution. But he had not gone far when suddenly a dark form loomed up before him.

There was no time to avoid a collision. Like a panther Frank gripped the unknown, feeling for his windpipe.

But a gurgling cry went up, which he feared was heard. Then Frank and the unknown closed in a deadly struggle.

How it might have ended it was not easy to guess. But suddenly lights flashed and dark forms appeared ahead.

This was enough. Frank dealt his opponent a terrific blow and then tore away and fled.

Barney and the count fled before him. But, strange to say, when Frank and the Celt reached the outer defile, the count was not with them.

"Where is he?" whispered Frank.

"Divil a bit do I know, sor," replied Barney. "I think he stopped back there, sir."

"We must go back after him, then."

"Too late, sor!"

This was true. Lights flashed, and the defile filled with shadowy forms.

To be captured might be fatal, so Barney and Frank fled. They turned into another defile and soon had distanced their pursuers in the labyrinth.

When they finally halted they saw the flash light of the Scourge.

"That is luck!" cried Frank. "We will go back there with the machine and find Vallonski."

He gave the signal and Pomp answered it. The Scourge came rolling up.

Pomp recognized Frank and Barney in the glare of the light and was delighted to see them.

Explanations were quickly made and Pomp said:

"There hab been a fight, sah, wif de sogers an' dem robbers."

"A fight?" exclaimed Frank, "where did it take place?"

"Right where we came into the Demon Land, sah!"

"Ah!" exclaimed the young inventor, anxiously. "Which side was victorious?"

CHAPTER VIII.

A FEARFUL FATE.

"De robbers, I ank, sah!" replied Pomp. "Dey scatter de sogers an' some ob dem escape out onto de plain. Soon oder sogers come, but dey am too late. If yo' haid been aho'd de Scourge I ank we cud hah caught dem, fo' snah!"

"Of course, we could," cried Frank, excitedly. "This is bad. Do you know if the robbers had a lady in their party?"

"It was too dark to tell, sah!"

"Humph!" exclaimed Frank, disappointedly. "This is the hardest kind of luck. There is no manner of doubt but that Ravetski will try and break through our line and remove the girl to some other point. I wish I had been on the spot."

"I done wish yo' haid, sah," declared Pomp.

"How long ago was this?"

"About an hour, sah!"

"Too late! They are, of course, now beyond pursuit. I can think

of no other purpose for Ravetski to try and break through our line. It is too bad. If it is the truth then we are wasting time here. I wish Vallonski had kept with us!"

"Mebbe we can find him yet, sah!"

"We must do so first. It may be that his life is in danger. Heaven help him if he has fallen into the hands of Ravetski."

"Shure, sor, it would be bad," declared Barney. "I think we ought to thry and rescue him at waunst, sor!"

"And we will."

Frank went into the pilot-house and started the machine on the return to the defile. But now a difficulty was encountered.

All the defiles looked alike, and it seemed almost impossible to find the right one. At last, however, they entered what Frank believed was the one they had left.

But it was deserted. Not a sound was heard, nor a sign seen of the robbers. Frank examined the defile for the wall where he had heard Olenka's and Ravetski's voices.

Finding what he believed was the right spot, he decided to blow a way through it with the electric gun.

Accordingly he placed a shell in the gun and trained it upon the wall. Then he pressed the button.

There was a terrific explosion.

The air was filled with flying particles of stone and dust. The wall was shattered and a cavity seen beyond.

That this was an entrance to the robbers' den Frank felt sure. But it was not, of course, large enough for the Scourge to enter.

Frank sent another shell into the wall to enlarge the breach. The soft sandstone yielded easily.

Larger and larger the breach became. Soon in the search-light's glare large cavernous openings were seen.

But none of the robbers put in an appearance, so that after all, very little was accomplished by the battering down of the walls.

The advantage which the robbers possessed was potent. They had but to remove to some other part of the honeycomb of passages.

Frank saw the futility of his efforts and felt baffled and disappointed. What else could he do?

He was chagrined to think that the foe could so absolutely bid him defiance.

In order to rout them from their den it would be necessary evidently to batter down the entire surface of Demon Land. This was a contract which Frank knew that he could not assume.

What was to be done?

This was the query.

A greater puzzle Frank Reade, Jr. had never attempted to solve. Finally he withdrew from the defile.

"If Ravetski has really sent the princess away, he is a fool," muttered Frank. "He will never find a safer place than right here."

Which seemed true.

Frank now was anxious to find the soldiers who had taken part in the affair with the robbers. He wished to learn from them if the princess had been in the escaping party.

He saw no way of solving the fate of Count Vallonski that night, unless, indeed, something new might turn up.

So the Scourge proceeded slowly toward the spot where the encounter had taken place.

Here some of the soldiers were yet on guard. Frank at once began to catechise them.

His mind was relieved at once. An officer of the troop explained to him at once what the object of the escaping robbers was.

"One of their number was left behind badly wounded!" said the sergeant. "We tortured him to a confession. It was not an attempt to take the princess out of captivity, but to send emissaries to the hordes of the Tuudras, to come hither in a body and surround and annihilate us!"

This was a revelation.

Indeed, Frank could see at once that it was of the utmost value to him. He might now be on his guard.

He also recognized the fact that in dealing with Ravetski, he was coping with a foe of no mean ability.

But on the other hand, he was rather glad of this procedure on the part of the foe.

It showed an intention to bring matters to an issue which was just what Frank wanted.

He had no fear whatever of the result of a conflict in open field. He knew that he could give the hordes a fearful battle.

It might prove the means of overthrowing Ravetski. Frank considered the matter well.

And, finally, having decided thus, he proceeded to lay his plans accordingly.

As it would be some days, perhaps, before the hordes might be expected, Frank decided to make some sort of active effort to learn the fate of Vallonski.

He feared that the count had met with sudden death in the narrow pass. Better this, though, than to have been made a prisoner.

While thus laying his plans, Frank was relieved to see that daylight was coming.

He now sent the Scourge around to the various detachments of soldiers to see that they were all right. Then he returned once more to the locality he had just left.

But as the machine entered this pocket in the network of defiles, Barney gave a sudden exclamation.

"Howly shooke!" he gasped. "Phwat do yez call that?"

All three of the explorers were petrified at a horrible spectacle which met their gaze.

In the centre of the enclosure, there stood upright, a thick and strong wooden stake. Upon it with contorted limbs sat the figure of a man.

The truth was apparent.

The poor wretch had been drawn upon this sharpened stake in the Cossack fashion with horses. Then the stake had been planted in the ground.

A peculiarity of this awful means of death is, that the victim may live for two days, while the horrible stake is gradually but surely forcing its way through the length of the body.

Blood covered the stake and the ground. The filmy eyes of the sufferer were fixed upon the Scourge. His limbs were contorted and froth was on his lips.

For a moment the sight nigh unmanned Frank and his companions. The Scourge was brought to a stop.

"Heaven's vengeance on the wretches!" exclaimed Frank. "That is horrible beyond compare. Only fiends could do such a thing as that!"

"Who am it?" asked Pomp. Then the explorers looked at each other.

Could it be the count?

Frank went out on deck and leaped over the rail. Barney followed him. In a moment they were at the stake.

The expression upon the sufferer's face was dreadful. But Frank and Barney saw at once that it was not Vallonski.

It was natural for them to experience a feeling of relief. Though their sympathy for the poor wretch was profound.

His features were not familiar to Frank.

"Who are you?" asked the young inventor, "and who has done this awful thing?"

The poor wretch's lips moved, but no sound came forth. His eyes filmed and a merciful faint came over him.

Then Frank saw that over his head there was a strip of paper pasted on a small rod fastened to his shoulder. This had an inscription in Russian.

Thus it read:

"A warning to all others. Witness the mighty Prince Petrowski making his peace with God. Look out that you are not the next victim.

"Per order, RAVETSKI."

"Prince Petrowski," gasped Frank. "My soul! He has also been in captivity with his daughter? This is horrible, horrible!"

Then he turned to Barney.

"Bring spades, you and Pomp!" he said. "We must take this poor wretch down. There is no hope for him, but we will palliate his sufferings all we can."

This was done.

The stake was taken down. It was no light task to remove it from the body of the unconscious man. A severe hemorrhage followed, but after cooling draughts were placed to his lips the dying man revived.

His eyes brightened momentarily, but it was long before the power of speech came back to him.

When it did, his first words were those of gratitude. But Frank said:

"Think not of that, prince. We are here by order of the Czar to have effected your rescue and that of your daughter."

"It is—too—late for me!" whispered the prince; "but my child—God help you to save her!"

"We will do our best," said Frank, forcefully. "And if we do not succeed, be sure that Bagun Ravetski shall suffer even as you are suffering now!"

The prince whispered words of gratitude. Then Frank asked him if the Count Vallonski was a prisoner of Ravetski's. But the prince knew not.

This only intensified the mystery of the count's strange disappearance. But every moment now Petrowski was growing weaker.

All that was possible with soothing drugs was done to make the end easy. Then a grave was dug and his remains tenderly interred. Frank was determined not to leave Siberia until Ravetski was brought to justice.

CHAPTER IX.

INTO THE LION'S DEN.

THE awful fate of Petrowski cast a gloom upon our explorers. Had it not been for the Princess Olenka, Frank would gladly have abandoned the whole affair and returned to the upper Tundras.

But he felt that the princess must be rescued.

All depended upon him.

The Czar's soldiery were but a morsel for Ravetski and his gang. They would have made but a feeble stand.

All that morning the Scourge patrolled the passes. But not a sign was seen of the robbers.

Frank was sure that the hordes could not put in an appearance until the next day.

So he decided upon a daring move to be executed that night. He called Barney and Pomp into the pilot-house and imparted it to them.

First he produced a couple of suits of steel armor, made of the finest but bullet proof netting. This covered the entire body, and could be worn under the clothing with the greatest of ease.

"I intend to effect an entrance to the stronghold of the foe," he said. "I want one of you to go with me. We may not come out alive."

Both Barney and Pomp sprang up, excitedly.

"Oh, massy Lordy! Do, fo' goodness sakes, lemme go wif yo', Marse Frank!" cried the coon. "It am mah turn, as sure as yo's bo'n!"

"Shure, Mlster Frank, yez had better lave the naygur to look after the Scourge, sor!"

"Then neither of you fear to undertake this risky jaunt with me?" asked Frank.

"Shure, sor, it's meself as is dyin' fer the opporchunity!" cried Barney.

"Marse Frank, yo' won't take no stock in dat 'fishman. Sho's yo's bo'n, I se de man to take!"

"How'd yure face, naygur!" cried Barney, angrily.

"Yo' go on, fo' an ole stall!" objected Pomp. "I se gwine to hab mah say, au' yo' kain't stop me!"

In spite of himself Frank could not help a laugh.

The eagerness of the two jokers and their anger at each other, without once thinking of the danger of the enterprise they were so ready to essay, amused him.

"Perhaps you may regret your eagerness when you learn how risky the trip will be!" he said.

"Divil a bit!" snickered Barney.

"I se ready fo' anyfin'," blustered Pomp.

"Well, we shall see," said Frank. "On the whole, I believe it is only fair play to allow Pomp to go with me on this trip. You were with me last, Barney."

"Golly!" yelled Pomp, turning a flip-flop.

"All right, sor!" said Barney, with a good-natured grin and disposed to make the best of the situation.

So it was decided.

Pomp donned one of the suits of armor and Frank the other. They armed themselves with small weapons, and each took a strong lariat.

Then, in a dark part of the defile, they dropped from the deck of the Scourge and vanished in the gloom.

Frank had not a very clear idea as to the best method of obtaining admittance to the robbers' stronghold.

He remembered that in following them through the cleft in the wall with the count, it had seemed as if a large open tract was there, enclosed by high walls of sandstone.

It occurred to him that he might get a look at this enclosure by climbing some one of these high walls.

He therefore kept on until he found one, which he believed might form a boundary of that open tract. Then he considered a plan for climbing it.

"How can we get up there, Pomp?" he asked of the coon in a whisper.

"Golly, Marse Frank," replied Pomp. "I kain't see no oder way 'cept to throw a noose up ober dat point ob rock up dar."

"Would it hold?"

"Kain't say, sah."

"It is too high."

"Shall I try, sah?"

"Yes!"

Pomp swung this noose up over his head and made a throw for the point of rock.

It struck just below the pinnacle of sandstone. The height was too great, and the lariat would not reach.

This was a disappointment.

Had it caught over the pinnacle, it would have been an easy matter to ascend the wall. The difficulty would easily have been overcome.

But there was little use in crying over spilt milk. The attempt was a failure, and it was now in order to make the best of it.

So Frank cast about for another plan.

It came to him like a flash.

He remembered that the cliff was of the softest sandstone. A saw would cut it like cheese.

He tried it with the point of his knife. It was easy to dig a small space in the soft stone. In this manner he began to cut apertures in the wall, into which he could put his hands and feet, and thus gradually work his way upward.

It was slow work, but sure. He kept on, getting nearer and nearer to the top of the wall. In due course he had made a ladder quite to the top, and swung himself up over the verge.

He was upon a flat surface of rock, the very face of the plateau. Everywhere were deep cuts and fissures.

But the surface upon which he stood was full forty feet in breadth. He stood erect. In a few moments Pomp was with him.

Quite an extended view might have been had from this elevated position in the daytime, but of course the darkness precluded that just now.

But just beyond he saw a large open space which might be easily the pocket or inclosure occupied by the robbers.

He led the way softly across the plateau, followed by Pomp. Soon they reached the verge.

And at that moment a bright star of light shone below in the black amphitheater.

It was a small fire, and dark forms were seen moving about it. Frank clutched Pomp's arm.

"We have hit the right spot," he declared. "This is the retreat of Ravetski and his gang."

"I reckon you're 'bout right, Marsa Frank, wha' ain de nex' move?"

"I wish I could see better. Oh, I believe the best plan is to descend and do a little reconnoitering. Perhaps we may locate and even rescue the Princess Olenka."

"Fo' de Lor, I hope so!"

"We will try it!"

Frank kept along the verge of the plateau as far as possible, until he was quite near the camp-fire.

But yet he could not recognize any of those hovering silently about it. That they were nomads, however, he felt sure.

But Frank did not long waste time thus. He had decided upon a hazardous feat.

Selecting a good spot, he knotted his lariat about a spur of the sandstone and lowered it into the enclosure.

It failed to touch the bottom, but it was placed out with Pomp's, and then Frank slid down, fearlessly.

Arrived at the bottom, he looked about him cautiously to make sure that all was safe. Then he signaled Pomp to follow him.

The coon did so and was quickly by Frank's side.

Crouching by the base of the cliff, they waited a long while to make sure the coast was clear. Then they began to creep along the wall like shadows.

They passed the camp-fires and were skirting the upper end of the enclosure, when they came to a high arched opening. It was a cavern leading into the cliff.

And far down its length a glimmer of flame was seen. This was really the entrance to the underground den of robbers.

Frank did not hesitate.

He slid boldly into the place, Pomp following him. They kept on over the gravelly floor of the cavern and every moment the light grew plainer.

It was plainly the light of a great fire. Then the cavern arch expanded and a great room was unfolded to view.

It was well lit up by the great fire of peat and fagots. About this lounged full half a hundred of the nomads. Just beyond them a man clad in black was striding impatiently up and down.

Frank and Pomp at once recognized him as the black rider who had brought the warning in the gorge. He was the ruler of Demon Land. Frank scrutinized him a while, closely. Then he said to Pomp:

"We are apt to win success. I believe the princess is not far away."

"Golly!" exclaimed Pomp. "If we could only jes' get a chaine, we'd mighty quick hoist her over dat cliff an' down abo'd de Scourge. I'd like to see dem git her den!"

"Perhaps we can do that," said Frank. "We will try it!"

But first of course, they must find Olenka. However, at this moment, one of the nomad women crossed the cavern chamber.

She carried a beautiful fur mantle over her arm. She paused a moment to jest with the men by the fire.

In that moment Frank decided that she was the companion or guardian of the princess. She was even now going to her. This gave the young inventor an idea.

"I will follow her!" he muttered.

The woman stopped a moment to speak to the man in black. Then she flitted into a side passage.

The shadows between Frank's position and this passage were dark enough, so he started in pursuit. Reaching the passage he dodged into it.

Pomp was close behind him.

A light glimmered just ahead. Frank crept toward it.

Then he beheld a startling sight. A small cavern chamber was seen, and upon a rude cot sat a young girl with her yellow hair flowing about her shoulders, and her fair face, lovely as a dream, though pale as a lily.

It was the Princess Olenka.

The woman waited upon her, and then started to leave the chamber. She passed so near to Frank and Pomp that they could have touched her.

But she did not see them, and as soon as she had vanished Frank made action. An unlooked-for thing happened, however.

CHAPTER X.

A DARING RESCUE.

It was Frank's purpose to attract the attention of the young princess and draw her to the shadows.

Then he could explain all to her, and formulate a plan of rescue. It did not look difficult.

He started along the wall of the chamber to get nearer to her before speaking. What looked like a jag or projection in the wall loomed up before him.

He put out a hand to steady himself against it, when, to his amazement, it moved.

The next instant it sprung upon him like a panther, and a voice hissed in his ear:

"Die, you dog! You shall not balk me in my purpose!"

But Frank had been as quick as his assailant, and grappled with him. He managed to get a counter-hold, and forced him against the wall.

"Hol' on to him, Marsa Frank!" whispered Pomp, hoarsely. "Ise gwine to help yo'! Look out f' de don' gib de alarm! Put yu' hand ober his mouf!"

The next moment, to Frank's surprise, his antagonist dropped his arms and yielded. At the same moment he whispered:

"My God! Is it you, friend Reade? What if we had killed each other? And we might have but for your colored man."

Frank was astounded.

"Count Nikolai!" he gasped.

"The same!" replied the other. "Are you not Frank Reade, Jr.?"

"I am."

"What a fortunate meeting and how timely. I thought you one of the robbers."

"And I thought you the same," spluttered Frank. "But—what became of you that night? Where have you been since?"

"It is quite a story!" replied the count. "I have been unable to leave this place for fear of being seen. I have been in hiding, only to discover the princess a few moments ago!"

"We thought you dead."

"Indeed, I do not wonder. My experiences have been many. But we must wait until a better time to explain. We are in great peril here. How came you here?"

Frank explained the methods of getting into the stronghold, at which Count Nikolai was greatly delighted. At once he foresaw a plan to rescue the princess and perhaps enable them all to escape.

All this while Olenka had been watching them, for she could see them indistinctly in the gloom.

She did not know what was going on or what they were saying. She simply knew that some figures were discussing a matter unknown to her out there in the passage.

A surprise was in store for her.

Suddenly a low but distinct voice came to her from the gloom:

"Olenka! Be not alarmed!"

In an instant the young girl was upon her feet, white and trembling. "Nikolai!" she whispered. "It is your voice?"

"Yes, Olenka! Be calm and strong. All depends upon your good tact and courage. We are here to rescue you!"

"Heaven be praised!"

"You will hold yourself ready to go with us. I will call you when the time comes. Then come to me here. But first I must find your father. Do you know where I may look for him?"

"Ah, would that I could. I know not if he is in this place at all."

"No," Frank whispered in the count's ear. "Keep your nerve. Prince Petrowski is no longer of this world."

"What! How do you know this?" asked the count.

"I will tell you later. It means that we have a dreadful score to settle with Ravetski."

"Yes, and the time is coming when that score shall be settled," said the count, in a tense manner. "But what shall our next move be?"

Frank turned to Pomp.

"Go to the end of the passage, Pomp, and see if the coast is clear. If it is, give us the signal. A slight whistle—you know."

"A'right, sah."

Pomp glided away on his mission. Some little time passed. Then the signal came.

"Olenka!" spoke the count. "Come! Liberty is before us!"

The young girl flitted into the shadows. In a moment she was in her lover's arms.

There was no time for more than a brief greeting. Then all flitted like shadows down the passage.

The crucial test was in passing through the large chambers. But this was successfully done. The shadows were very dense beyond the circle of firelight.

With a thrill the fugitives crept into the outer passage. Their apprehension could not be explained in words as they tried to reach the outer air.

Of course, there was risk in every step taken. At any moment someone of the robbers might hear them, and have his attention attracted. Betrayal would mean certain recapture.

Then at any moment, the princess' woman attendant might return to the inner cavern to find her charge missing.

Of course, then an outcry would be made, and an alarm sounded. The peril would then be intense.

Frank led the way. The count with Olenka came next, and Pomp brought up the rear.

Steadily and slowly they made their way through the outer passage. Already they felt the chill of the night air in their faces.

The glimmer of the camp-fire in the enclosure was seen. A few moments later they emerged from the cavern and stood in the outer air. Freedom was a step nearer.

It was now necessary to proceed along the wall of the enclosure until they should reach the lariat. No time was lost.

Cautiously now they crept along in the intense darkness. Nearer and nearer they drew to the objective point.

Suddenly Frank felt something brush his face. He put a hand up and caught hold of the lariat.

"Pomp!" he whispered. "Come here! Go up there!"

The coon needed no prompting.

He went up the rope like a monkey. He reached the verge of the cliff. Then Frank placed the lariat under the arms of the princess.

"Have courage!" he whispered. "You will ascend in safety!"

Then he gave Pomp the signal.

Up went the light form of Olenka. Up and up, and when she had cleared the brow of the plateau, Frank drew a deep breath of relief. "It is done," he said. "Now, for ourselves. It has been a greater success than I had dared to hope!"

"For which Heaven be praised!" declared the count, fervently.

But the words had barely left his lips, when the air was broken with a distant dull roar. It came from the mouth of the cavern.

Frank clutched the count's arm.

"They have discovered the princess' escape," he said.

"Heaven guard us!"

"They are coming!"

Torches flashed everywhere. The tramp of feet was heard all around. At that moment the lariat fell at Frank's feet.

He grasped it and drew the count nearer.

"Up!" he said. "Up, for your life!"

"But you——" began Nikolai.

"It is for you to go first. I will follow," said Frank, almost sternly. The count delayed no longer.

He went up the lariat slowly. Pomp assisted him over the verge. Then Frank followed.

All now stood upon the summit of the plateau. In the darkness they could not be seen from below. Pomp drew up and secured the lariats.

Frank led the way across the plateau to the spot where he had with Pomp ascended. Here the lariats were made use of again.

But just as the lariat was lowered the defile became filled with dark forms. They flashed here and there as if in quest of something.

And so they were, in quest of the escaped princess. The fugitives crouched at the verge of the cliff, for it would have been madness to have descended.

But at this critical moment a blinding light flashed up the defile.

Pomp sent up a singular cat-call signal. It was answered from the direction of the bright light.

The light came from the search-light of the Scourge. Barney had answered Pomp's call.

In an instant the dark forms in the defile vanished. Then the Scourge ran up through the defile to the very spot where our adventurers were waiting.

Down the rope slid the count and Pomp. Frank lowered the princess. Then he slid down himself.

Wrathful cries came from up the defile. The robbers had at last caught on, and their rage, though impotent, was furious. Rifle bullets whistled through the night air.

Fortunately they did no damage. Our adventurers got safely aboard the Scourge, and then the fire was answered.

The robbers were quickly silenced. The victory was a sweeping one.

Words cannot depict the joy of all. Only one thing palled upon it, and this was the dreadful fate of Prince Petrowski.

As yet, the Princess Olenka did not know the details, and it was decided by all never to tell her. She should be informed that her father was dead, but nothing more.

For this she had been prepared. Indeed, from the first hour of their capture she had believed her father dead.

And though her grief was poignant, yet the edge was not as keen as it might have been otherwise. She was given the privacy of a small room off the main cabin of the Scourge, and here she was left alone with her grief.

It would have been an easy matter now for the count to have called in his soldiers and made a start for the boundary line of Russia. He had accomplished the object of his expedition.

But the desire to inflict punishment upon Ravetski for the awful fate of Petrowski was strong in the young noble's breast.

He could not think of allowing the prince to go unavenged. So he said:

"I will not leave Siberia or the Tundras until Ravetski has also been drawn upon the stake, or at least met with a fitting punishment."

Frank Reade, Jr., nodded emphatically.

"I will assist you!" he declared. "It is a just cause."

CHAPTER XI.

THE DEFEAT OF THE HORDES.

DAYLIGHT came and brought exciting news.

One of the outposts came in with the report that the northern horizon line was black with moving figures. The soldiers were all uneasy.

The count turned to Frank, and said:

"The hordes of the Tundras. They are coming, perhaps twenty thousand of them!"

"Indeed," said Frank, in a matter-of-fact way.

The count looked at him, narrowly. Then he said:

"Pardon me, noble friend, but if you fear the risk of meeting such an enormous force, I will waive my vengeance upon Ravetski for the

time. There is no reason why you should sacrifice yourself in my cause!"

"Pshaw!" said Frank.

"Do you think you can safely meet such numbers?"

"Even if they were as thick as the leaves on the trees, so long as they do not bring cannon!" declared Frank. "You shall see!"

"I trust you are right. But if there is any doubt——"

"There is none!"

This settled the matter. The soldiers were all called in now. Frank gave orders that they remain in the cover of the high sandstone walls of Demon Land.

"The Scourge would go out alone to meet the foe," he said. He would answer for the result.

Frank now steered the Scourge out on the plain.

It needed but a glance to see that the report was correct. The entire horizon line was black with advancing horsemen.

If such a force could have been collected in such a short space of time it was not easy to guess. It showed that the tribes of the Tundras were bound in one common band, and were at all times with in easy communication with each other.

Frank studied the position of the foe carefully.

They were advancing in the form of a crescent, the right and left wing converging to half inclose the Scourge. Frank saw that the purpose of the foe was to draw these two points to a common junction.

"They mean to surround us, Mr. Reade," said Nikolai. "Had we not better guard against that?"

"On the contrary; that is just what I want them to do," declared Frank.

The count looked puzzled, but said nothing.

Frank continued to progress deeper into the circle, while the hordes kept closing up. They were now quite distinguishable individually.

They were magnificent horsemen, using neither saddle nor blanket. Their ponies seemed a part of themselves. The sun glinted on their gleaming weapons, and they made an imposing display.

A dull roar could be heard rolling over the plain at times, which was their cheering. The rumbles of their horses hoofbeats was like distant thunder.

It would seem as if the Scourge, one lone vehicle, with only four defenders aboard, would be easily swept down and crushed by that enormous weight of numbers.

But such a contingency Frank did not fear.

He went into the pilot-house and took a position at the keyboard. Then he said to Barney:

"Do you go to the electric gun. Have it constantly trained, and wait my order for firing."

"All right, sir!"

The Celt hastened to the gun. Pomp stood ready to assist him. The count was only a spectator, but he remained with Olenka by the cabin window.

What followed was grand in the extreme. The plain had a smooth and hard surface, which was greatly in the favor of the Scourge.

Frank held a steady hand on the lever. He was able to turn the Scourge, at full speed, in any direction, and maneuver as skillfully as if the machine had been an animated being.

Nearer drew the line of foes. The air was thunderous with their yells.

Many of them had already opened fire with their guns. The bullets rattled against the armor of the Scourge like hail.

Nearer the points of the circle drew. Soon it was completed.

Then the great body of horsemen began to close in. Frank drew a deep breath.

The crisis was at hand. The moment for concerted action had come. He was ready.

He selected a point in the converging line where he believed it was the thickest. Then he opened the lever wide.

"Train the gun, Barney!" he cried. "Fire!"

The Celt acted quickly.

He placed his finger upon the electric button. The air chamber closed, and the shell was on its way.

In the smallest part of a second it struck the line of barbarians. The result was sudden and fearful to witness.

It seemed as if a volcanic eruption occurred in their midst. An awful explosion smote upon the air.

Then, up for a height of fifty feet rose a pillar of dust, earth, flame and shattered bodies. A great furrow was plowed in the mossy soil, into which men and horses tumbled.

Again the gun sent a shell to a point just at the right of this. The result was dreadful to witness.

A great lane was plowed through the oncoming line of horses. And through this the Scourge shot at full speed.

It was now outside the deadly circle. Frank swung the machine about and was now in the rear of the line.

Again Barney sent a shell into the line, this time in the rear.

Men and horses were blown to bits. The line was disordered and driven into a writhing mass of excited, men and terrified horses. Words were inadequate to depict the situation.

Again and again shells were sent into the mass of men and horses. It became wholesale slaughter and of this Frank sickened.

"Hold out!" he cried. "Enough of that, Barney. Try the other end of the line."

Leaving this section of the foe's formation to disentangle itself, Frank turned the Scourge to the southward to meet the opposite flank, which had come about in good order, and was advancing to the assistance of the routed division.

And now, Frank showed his generalship. The Scourge sent a shell into the midst of the advancing line. Then he circled to strike the right flank.

But finding the line turning also, he again drove straight at the center, sending shell after shell through the ranks, and literally mowing a way through the horde.

In vain the desperate and valorous barbarians sought to strike the machine. It dodged here and there as elusive as an eel, and all the while kept up such a hot fire that the foe were unable to even for a moment remain in battle line.

This sort of work could not fail to have its effect.

The ground was covered with dead men and horses. The bullets of the barbarians rattled harmlessly against the armor of the Scourge. It seemed only a question of time for the Scourge to actually exterminate the entire horde.

Madly, almost insanely, the furious barbarians tried to close with their foe. But it was almost an utter impossibility.

At all points Frank had the best of them.

The Czar's soldiers, safely ensconced in the sandstone terraces of the Demon Land, gazed with wonder and admiration upon the battle. It could be seen that an army was no match on this level plain with ordinary weapons for the Scourge.

The count could hardly believe his eyesight. He gazed upon the scene with literal wonderment.

But he was delighted as well.

"Oh, if only Ravetski were out here!" he cried. "But he must be a witness of this rout of his allies."

This was true. Ravetski was a witness, and that day was to see his star set forever.

Again and again the Scourge riddled the line of barbarians. Times without number they rallied, but were unable to make any attack upon the elusive Scourge.

And finally the truth began to dawn upon them individually as well as collectively, that they had caught a tartar and that their cause was a hopeless one.

When once this conviction settled upon a body of fighting men, their fate is sealed. So it was with Ravetski's horde.

Doggedly they began to withdraw to the upper defiles of the Demon Land. They were driven with fearful loss from the open ground.

And when they had finally gained the refuge of the deep channels and cuts of Demon Land, the plain looked like a battlefield indeed. The ground was torn and rent with the dynamite and hundreds of the foe were lying dead in heaps.

It was a signal victory for the Scourge. That day Frank Reade, Jr., had covered himself with glory in the eyes of all Russians.

He had regretted more than words could tell the sacrifice of life. But he could not deny nor could anyone else that it was necessary.

But one thing more remained to be done, and this was to wreak vengeance upon Ravetski for the fearful murder of Prince Petrowski.

How to accomplish this, however, was a problem.

The villain seemed to be in safe hiding in the depths of the Demon Land, and it was going to be no easy matter to hunt him out.

After some consultation, Count Nikolai said:

"On the whole, I think we had better leave it to time to settle. Perhaps God may will it that I shall meet Ravetski face to face before I die. Then I will avenge!"

"It shall be as you say," declared Frank.

"Well, let us abandon the plan for now. We may as well return to St. Petersburg with the princess. We will there await the pleasure of the Czar!"

"I shall accompany you as far as a point of safety," said Frank. "Then we will part company."

"How?" exclaimed the count. "The Czar will insist upon rewarding you personally. What are your plans?"

"I shall go across the Tundras as far as Kamtchatka on an exploring tour. Then I mean to strike south to China, and finally reach Hong Kong, and thence ship home. By that time I shall have made nearly a complete circuit of Asia."

"Wonderful!" cried Nikolai. "I wish I were traveling with you."

This was Frank's plan. Barney and Pomp were enthusiastic.

The soldiers were now summoned from their point of safety. Count Nikolai gave them directions to ride alongside the Scourge.

And westward now the course was set. At the base of the Ural Mountains it was deemed safe for the party to go on alone.

Thence Frank meant to return to the Tundras. The count, with Princess Olenka, would go on to St. Petersburg, and there report to the Czar. Thus the plans were laid.

CHAPTER XII.

THE END OF THE TALE.

BUT best laid plans do not always succeed. The old saw is a very truthful one.

At the base of the Ural Mountains the party found themselves at the close of a warm summer's day.

Here was a small mountain inn. They were now in the Czar's dominion, at least, that part of it under subjection to his laws, and all felt safe.

Consequently the vigilance with which they had crossed the Tundras was relaxed.

The Scourge was run into the high walled yard of the inn and here securely locked, and with the wheels trigged, it was deemed safe.

Frank, with Barney and Pomp, were desirous of sleeping that night in the inn, as a change from their bunks aboard the Scourge.

The inn-keeper, a jovial fellow, had made everything cheerful.

A great fire burned on the black fireplace, for the evenings in the mountains were chilly. A smoking repast with flagons of Russian wine was on the long table.

There were other travelers at the inn, but they were strangers to our party. These retired early to rest.

But Barney and Pomp brought out the fiddle and banjo, and sat by the fire-place with Frank, the count and Olenka. The inn-keeper and his servants sat in the background and applauded.

The two jokers made merry with Irish jigs and plantation songs. Thus the hour wore on toward midnight.

The count had just suggested retiring, when suddenly there came a loud rap at the strong oaken door. It fairly made the hinges rattle.

"Mercy, good friends," cried the inn-keeper, springing up, "who can that be at this hour of the night?"

"Some belated traveler probably," cried the count. "Jump up, my dog-brother, and admit him."

The inn-keeper sprang to undo the bolts. In a moment the door swung open.

Then the inn-keeper was hurled by an iron arm across the broad apartment. Dark featured savage men swarmed over the threshold.

At their head was a man dressed all in black.

His eyes were like living coals of fire and were instantly fixed ravenously upon Olenka.

In an instant Count Nikolai was upon his feet with drawn sword. He thrust the princess behind him.

"Ravetski!" he roared. "Son of a dog! How have you dared to come here!"

"I dare to go even to the palace of the Czar in pursuit of you!" thundered the exile. "You have stolen her from me, but I have won her back. She is mine again and so is your soul and body, for this place is surrounded by my faithful men and you cannot escape. I demand your surrender!"

Frank Reade Jr., Barney and Pomp had arisen and drawn their revolvers. The inn-keeper cowered in the corner.

It was a desperate moment.

At that moment Nikolai regretted having left his body guard of soldiers at the village a mile below. There was no chance to get word to them. What could be done?

To reach the Scourge was just now impossible. Indeed, through the widow sash the flash of torches were seen in the yard.

No doubt the machine was in their hands. Everything seemed lost.

The count was white as a sheet. But he was ready to die in defense of Olenka.

"You see," said Ravetski, mockingly. "The tables have turned, my dog-brother. You thought never to hear from Ravetski again. You are helpless. It is useless to resist. You may as well submit, own to defeat. There is a nice polished stake waiting for you, and I promise there shall be no delay in drawing you on it."

Nikolai's form towered aloft like that of a giant. Flame leaped from his dark eyes.

"Dog!" he hissed, madly. "You have no spark of manhood. No honor, or you would settle this issue between us man to man."

Ravetski laughed.

"It would be scant sport for me to kill you in such a merciful manner," he replied, mockingly. "My revenge must be sweeter than that. I want to see you on the stake, to see you beg for mercy like a whipped dog. That is my test of manhood as you are pleased to term it!"

At this moment an unexpected thing happened.

The inn-keeper, of whom nothing had been expected, had crawled slowly out of his corner. He was unnoticed.

But his wolfish eyes were upon the villain with desperate intensity. In his hand he held one of the wine flagons.

He was a powerful framed man. What motive spurred him to the plucky act could never be explained, but he suddenly leaped up like a panther and hurled the flagon in Ravetski's face.

So swift and unexpected was the blow that the villain came to his knees. The wine blinded him.

Then the inn-keeper roared:

"Out of the paneled door yonder. Up the stairs and lower the trap!"

Every word was heard by the fugitives. Ravetski's barbarians sprang forward, but were met with a pistol volley from Frank, Barney and Pomp.

The inn-keeper had darted into a side door, which led into the inner part of the inn. All was done in the twinkling of an eye.

Nikolai caught Olenka by the waist and rushed through the paneled door. Up the stairs in the dark he sprang.

Frank Reade, Jr., Barney and Pomp, spring rapidly, followed. The fire was returned by Ravetski's men, but fortunately did no harm.

The woodwork was splintered—Barney's cap was shot away, but this was the extent. A moment later the defenders of the inn were at the head of the stairs.

Here was a great oaken trap, which could be lowered in case of emergency. But Frank decided not to close it yet.

With their pistols they could hold at bay any who might attempt to ascend the stairs. The advantage was theirs.

Ravetski cleared the wine from his eyes, and now, like a mad bull, urged his men up the stairs. But they met with a hot fire. Soon the stairway was choked with their bodies.

And now the clangor of a great bell rang out on the night air. In many of the Russian inns, there was a tower and a bell, for the purpose of sending an alarm to the scattered residents of the town, in case of an attack, which was a common thing on the Siberian frontier, where lawless Cossacks roved about.

It had been many years since this bell had been used. But the inn-keeper had at once made for the bell tower.

Ravetski knew what it meant.

It would call not only the count's bodyguard, but the frontier out fast, quite a strong body of soldiers in themselves. They were but a mile away, and on fleet horses it would not take them long to reach the inn.

At once the defenders of the stairway grew hopeful. But yet the peril was great.

One more mad attempt Ravetski made to gain the stairway. But failing he caught a fire-brand from the hearth.

"Burn—kill—blow up!" he roared. "Leave not one stone upon another."

The barbarians needed no urging. At once, with horrid yells, they began to fire the inn.

Stables, sheds, and inn, were instantly in flames. Our adventurers knew now that all depended upon the quick arrival of the soldiers.

The flames were spreading everywhere. The inn-keeper came rushing down from the bell tower.

"Courage, brothers!" he shouted. "The soldiers are coming!"

Our friends could not resist the impulse to cheer. But this was answered with an unearthly explosion.

The inn rocked like a ship at sea. The ceilings fell, panels split, doors dropped from their casings, and windows crashed in.

"Mother of Mary!" gasped Count Nikolai, "what was that?"

"Frank's face was pale, but he said, calmly:

"Too bad. Our further exploration of the Tundras is made impossible. That was the Scourge. The fire reached the dynamite and she is no more."

Barney and Pomp were nearly paralyzed with this announcement. They were keenly disappointed.

The smoke now grew thicker. Flames ran up the side of the room.

"My inn is gone!" groaned the inn-keeper. "All I have in the world is swept from me!"

"Courage, my man!" said Count Nikolai, kindly. "Your loss shall be made good. You have aided the Czar by saving our lives, and he will not be ungrateful."

At this the inn-keeper was overjoyed. He rushed to a window and shouted:

"They are here! The soldiers are here! We are saved!"

The din of a bitter conflict was heard below. Blows and curses, shots and clash of steel. But before long all was over.

Meanwhile, our adventurers had found their way down the stairway and into the main room of the inn. They were soon in the outer air.

Here the count found his faithful lieutenant. The particulars were soon known.

The barbarians had been nearly exterminated, for the party was not a large one, and Ravetski was a prisoner.

At this bit of news the count's eyes became like balls of fire.

"Ah!" he grunted, "retribution is ever bound to come! Now Prince Petrowski shall be avenged!"

The inn, however, was beyond redemption.

It soon was only a pile of smouldering ashes. In it was all that was left of the Scourge.

Of course Frank regretted the loss of his invention. But yet he treated the matter philosophically.

"We have escaped with our lives," he said. "That is of more importance."

"The Czar will repay you," said Count Nikolai. "Olenka is to him as the apple of his eye."

"I ask no reward, nor will I accept it," declared Frank.

Morning came, and then a consultation was held as to the best move to be made. Of course all that could be done was to push forward on horseback for the nearest point of railroad connecting with St. Petersburg.

Count Nikolai's guard was now deemed sufficient.

Olenka was a good horsewoman, and stood the jaunt nobly. Ravetski, bound hand and foot, rode between an armed guard.

He was being taken to the Czar for punishment. This time he would hardly be accorded exile.

He was sullen and morose. His murderous eyes at times fixed themselves on Olenka in a manner which made her faint.

The inn-keeper rode in Nikolai's train, for the count was determined that the Czar should personally reward the brave fellow.

Day after day they traveled on thus. Then they reached the telegraph lines.

Now the news of their return spread broadcast over all Russia. They were given an ovation in every town.

Carriages were now provided them, and finally a special train took them down to St. Petersburg.

Straight to the Czar's presence they went. The Czarina welcomed Olenka with tears of joy. The Czar was in a happy frame of mind.

He made a noble of the inn-keeper and sent him home rich and happy. Olenka and the count were publicly betrothed by him.

To Frank Reade, Jr., Barney and Pomp he offered a principality, but Frank refused all reward, modestly, but firmly. He, however, was a guest at court for a week, when he embarked aboard a steamer for Copenhagen and thence home.

Frank often receives letters from Count Nikolai and his bride. Should he ever go to Russia again he would be an honored guest with them.

But what of Ravetski? His fate was never published. In the secret prisons of Russia he doubtless paid for his villainy in Russian fashion. So he met his end.

The trip to the Tundras had been a success in spite of the loss of the Scourge. Frank was satisfied and said:

"Sometime I will visit Siberia again. Perhaps I may employ different means of travel.

And so ends our tale.

[THE END.]

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